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FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE'S WORK FOR PUBLIC HEALTH.

The recent publication by Macmillan in two thick volumes of what is likely to be the final and most authoritative life of Florence Nightingale, makes it possible to estimate as never before the true place of this most extraordinary woman in the public health movement of the nineteenth century. Miss Nightingale was, of course, primarily an administrator, an executive, a teacher, and above all else a mighty force and inspiration. But she was also passionately fond of figures, and might easily have done original work in statistics, especially in vital statistics, over which she spent many sleepless nights, and which she was fond of discussing with so great an authority as Dr. William Farr. As it stands today she belongs among those British pioneers, largely laymen, of whom Edwin Chadwick, William Farr, Lyon Playfair and Charles Kingsley are good examples, whose work

was much like that of John the Baptist, namely, crying in the wilderness, and preparing the way of the Lord. We refer now not to Miss Nightingale's great work as the founder of trained nursings, itself a contribution to the public health of the highest value, but rather to her preaching and teaching specifically directed toward sanitation and the general improvement of the public health.

At the very beginning of her first great work, that in the British military hospitals of Scutari (Turkey) in the Crimean War of 1855, she saw that nursing was in vain so long as the buildings, imposing to look at, were veritable pest houses, beneath which were sewers of the worst sort, "loaded with filth, mere cesspools in fact, through which the winds blew sewer air up the pipes of numerous open privies, into the corridors and wards where the sick were lying." There was also "frightful overcrowding and no proper ventilation." "It is impossible," she says, "to describe the state of the atmosphere at night." This was in March, but by June she had got the hospitals into such a condition that "they compared favorably with any in Europe."

But what is most remarkable of all is that she put her finger almost instantly upon the cause of all this sanitary neglect, namely, the total lack of hygiene and sanitation in the medical education of the time. "There is nothing," she wrote, while discussing the neglect of the most ordinary precautions in the hospitals of Scutari, "there is nothing in the education of the medical officer which would have met the case of the hospitals." When we remember that it is only since 1898 that our own Army Medical Service has given due heed to education in hygiene and sanitation, and recall our own bad record in the concentration camps of the Spanish-American War, it is startling to find that we were then nearly half a century behind the British. For in 1860 Florence Nightingale had the satisfaction of securing for the British army the establishment of an Army Medical School and the appointment of Dr. E. A. Parkes to the chair of hygiene in the new school.

This splendid achievement alone would have placed Miss Nightingale among the pioneers, but when we consider in addition her long and fruitful struggles for the improvement of the public health of India; her recognition of the need of having less heroic and fundamental work in supposedly enlightened England; her insistence upon education in hygiene and sanitation as the only hope of betterment in any community; and her perception of the necessity of village sanitation; besides her foundation work for trained nursing and district nursing—the full significance of which is only just beginning to be felt by public health authorities—we have pioneering so great and so effective as to make secure the name of Florence Nightingale among the immortals of sanitary science and public health practice. It is greatly to be hoped that her "Life" may find a high and permanent place in all libraries, laboratories and workshops devoted to the theory and practice of hygiene, nursing and sanitation.